

[Review] *Still a Man's World: Men in 'Women's Professions'* by Christine L. Williams

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Still a Man's World: Men Who Do "Women's Work." By Christine L. Williams. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995. x, 243 pp. \$40.00. ISBN 0-520-08787-9.

Here Christine Williams broadens themes developed in *Gender Differences At Work: Women and Men in Non-Traditional Occupations* (Berkeley: University of California, 1989), a comparison between the effects on male nurses and female marines of working in "gendered occupations," to four professions traditionally allied by reason of similarities in their historical development and in their gender composition (nursing, social work, elementary school teaching, and librarianship), and breaks new ground in feminist analysis. Her interviews with seventy- six males and twenty-three females in these professions in the metropolitan areas of San Francisco—Oakland, Phoenix, Boston, and Austin provide fascinating evidence of how both men and women are subtly socialized into professional gender ideology. She partially rejects Rosabeth Moss Kanter's theory of tokenism, since it fails to account for the fact that male tokens in female professions almost invariably are "elevated" by their token status" (8). Whereas women suffer from a "glass ceiling" effect in terms of advancement in male and female professions (with male librarians, for example, holding a disproportionate number of administrative positions relative to their numbers), even men who would prefer doing less prestigious jobs encounter a "glass escalator effect," that is, "inexorable pressures to move up" (12). Williams goes beyond descriptive analysis to ask how and, more importantly, why we are preoccupied with masculinity and the negative connotations of "women's work" (including male femininity and the gay stereotype), and her answers, while they may leave some readers unsettled, go far in mapping out the rituals and processes of male privilege in feminized professions: distancing behavior (putting down the profession, for instance, or refusing to participate in "female" rituals like preparing a casserole for a group gathering); disassociation (such as discounting the profession or blaming gays in their ranks for low professional status); or differential mentoring of male employees (in which female supervisors often complicitly participate). Williams concludes that most of the tokenism and discrimination that men encounter in these fields works to their advantage.

As she notes, her interviewees "apparently tried to avoid my apparently feminist sensibilities," and she oversampled atypical "feminine" specialties such as children's librarians and school media specialists in order to obtain examples of men at the extremes of the gender-specific work scale (192). Wherever they work and however they soften their responses, men are motivated to rise to the top; it is to the author's credit that she never suggests that her subjects are intentionally insensitive to their female colleagues.

Williams admits that there are certain "gender renegades" who seek "alternative masculinities" within each of these professions (141-3), like the former hippie-artist librarian who doesn't "give a damn about [pay]" (142), but who works for the intrinsic satisfaction that his profession affords, but examples such as these are rare. By any account, gender equity in the female professions is an elusive ideal, and Williams does not hesitate to report instances in which females perpetrate male privilege, unwittingly or not.

The solutions which Williams proposes to this gender perplex are eminently sane. Certainly it is unrealistic to expect massive structural changes along gender lines in these professions; and it is foolish to recruit greater numbers of men as a salvo to low professional prestige and pay, as has been done since the 1930s, since that only encourages more vertical stratification and might eventually displace women in severe economic downturns. Rather, Williams supports the kind of gradual change that has been occurring in society at large on a daily basis since 1970 (men becoming more involved in child rearing; women becoming more involved in politics), which one hopes will eventually foster mutual appreciation of sex and social role expectations between men and women. She is correct to be appalled at the misdirected turn which the men's studies movement has taken in the hands of practitioners like John Bly, since separatism is (again) based on the differences between men and women, and ultimately the assumption of male superiority. In the final analysis, men in nontraditional occupations "represent a ray of hope . . . but not in any straightforward way. However, the next generation may be forming completely different impressions of masculinity because of them" (187).

A superb methodological appendix describes the plan of the study. Only two lacunae were noted by this reviewer: age, and date professional degrees were obtained. While most of the men seem to be in the over-forty category, it is difficult to tell which generation of librarians are represented. The author cites appropriate standard historical sources in librarianship and does a particularly fine job of drawing historical similarities and differences between these "gendered occupations" in chapter 2 ("The Rise and Fall of 'Women's Professions' "). The index seems adequate, if not greatly detailed.

All of these professions have needed an analysis such as this for many years, and while some readers may quibble with particular interpretations, the importance of the book is difficult to overestimate. Readers familiar with feminist perspectives on librarianship, the sociology of the professions, and the history of American librarianship may find little to startle them in the findings of this book with respect to women in librarianship. Nowhere, however, can they find a study of comparable scope, elegance, and power which describes male privilege in what sociologists used to call only a few decades ago the "feminine semi-professions." Moreover, it is the only monograph to date to deal specifically with men in librarianship. Williams has written an unflinching and compelling analysis of great lucidity, and in this reader's opinion it should be required reading in professional programs and discussed widely by practitioners in these fields.